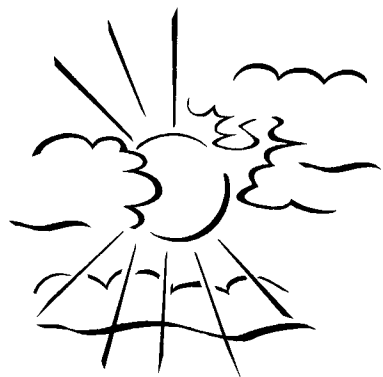


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Articles in Today's Clips

Thursday, October 6, 2005

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Published October 6, 2005
[From the Lansing State Journal]

House OKs whistle-blowers measure

Legislation grants rights to sue to help curb Medicaid fraud

By David Eggert
Associated Press

Whistle-blowers could sue a Medicaid provider on the state's behalf to fight fraud under legislation approved Wednesday by the Michigan House.

The state attorney general could intervene in the lawsuit, and the person filing suit could receive up to 30 percent of a settlement.

The chamber voted 106-2 to send the bill to the Senate.

Fraud costs the state 3 percent to 10 percent of its annual \$8 billion Medicaid budget, which covers health care costs for more than 1.4 million low-income children, seniors, pregnant women and the disabled, according to testimony given to the House Judiciary Committee.

The bill, pushed by Attorney General Mike Cox, would let any person file a civil suit in the state's name to recover losses from Medicaid fraud. An employer would be barred from firing, demoting, suspending or threatening an employee because he or she had sued or cooperated in a fraud investigation.

The legislation would allow plaintiffs to get 15 percent to 25 percent of a settlement if the attorney general's office became involved. Those who win a lawsuit without any help would receive 25 percent to 30 percent of the settlement.

The bill's supporters told members of a House panel that other states allowing people to sue have been more successful in recovering Medicaid dollars from providers.

Cox has said health care providers would be less inclined to steal from Medicaid if they knew their employees could file a lawsuit on behalf of the state.

Republicans Reps. Bruce Caswell of Hillsdale and Scott Hummel of DeWitt voted against the bill.

Hummel said he thought a whistle-blower should come forward for altruistic reasons and not for financial gain.

Reps. John Garfield, R-Rochester, and Clarence Phillips, D-Pontiac, were absent and did not vote.

Also Wednesday, Cox announced that he charged a Macomb County corporation and its owner with filing false Medicaid claims. Always Angels Nursing Service Inc., of Shelby Township, is accused of billing Medicaid for services that weren't provided between November 2002 and July 2004.

If convicted, the corporation's owners face up to four years in prison and a \$50,000 fine.

Michigan Report

October 5, 2005

MEDICAID FRAUD-FIGHTING BILL **CLEAR HOUSE**

A bill which backers hope will help the state to fight against fraud in the Medicaid system won easy approval Wednesday in the House. The measure allows individuals to bring civil suits on behalf of the state to recover losses from fraud, and if the fraud is being committed by their employer, to be covered with whistleblower protections.

The \$8 billion Medicaid program is one of the state's fastest growing, and estimates of the money lost through fraud range from \$240 million to \$800 million a year.

Attorney General Mike Cox strongly backs the bill and his office would be empowered to intervene in the civil lawsuits and take primary responsibility for pursuing all legal avenues. The civil suit could not even be dismissed until the attorney general was notified and had an opportunity to appear in court to oppose the action.

As an incentive to bring out more information, the whistleblower would be eligible for a reward of up to 15 percent-30 percent of a settlement, with lesser amounts provided if the attorney general does intervene in the case.

Michigan recovered \$7 million due to fraud in 2003, while other states with provisions similar to that in HB 4577 do far better, such as Virginia's \$16 million in recoveries that year.

The attorney general could not dismiss or settle a case in which it took over primary responsibility without first notifying the person who first brought the suit and providing that person with an opportunity to participate in the hearing. An individual could pursue the suit even if the attorney general chose not to get involved.

A person bringing a frivolous suit would face a fine of up to \$10,000.

Bill sponsor Rep. David Law (R-Commerce Township) said, "We need to do everything we can to encourage health-care workers who are aware of fraud to come forward without fear of retribution. It is also important during these tough budgetary times to find ways to continue offering Medicaid services to those who really need the help."

Rep. Scott Hummel (R-DeWitt), who along with Rep. Bruce Caswell (R-Hillsdale) cast the only votes against the bill in the 106-2 vote, said he did so because he views the financial incentive as inappropriate. "I think people should do this for altruistic reasons," he said. "If we took the incentive out, I could support it."

MIR

October 5, 2005

House Passes Medicaid Fraud Bill

In an effort to turn up the heat on providers and others who defraud the Medicaid system, the House today passed HB 4577, sponsored by Rep. David LAW (R-West Bloomfield).

According to testimony given before the House Judiciary Committee, fraudulent Medicaid claims can account for between three and 10 percent of Medicaid spending. For Michigan and its \$800 million budget, that means fraud could be costing taxpayers between \$240 and \$800 million.

To turn the clamps on that fraud, Law's bill allows anyone to bring a civil action on the state's behalf to recover fraudulently spent Medicaid dollars. At a later point, the Attorney General could take over the prosecution of any such civil action.

The measure would also provide several things for folks that blow the whistle on fraud. Traditional protections afforded such so-called whistleblowers would be extended to those turning in Medicaid frauds.

On top of that, for residents who bring a civil action on behalf of the state, they'd get their legal fees paid for and they'd personally receive 15 to 25 percent of any monetary proceeds if the Attorney General intervened. If the Attorney General didn't intervene the filers would net 25 to 30 percent.

It was that provision that led to at least one of the only two no votes on the bill in the House.

"I just wasn't comfortable with it," said Rep. Scott HUMMEL (R-DeWitt). Hummel argued that the incentive could lead people to pursue fraud cases where there wasn't merit. He noted a physician or provider could easily have their reputation and business destroyed by a false claim.

The bill, as passed, does provide for a substantial \$10,000 penalty for anyone who files a false claim of Medicaid fraud.

According to the House Fiscal Agency, other states using this approach have benefited. As an example, the agency notes that while Michigan fraud investigations in 2003 yielded \$7 million, Virginia recovered \$16 million, Florida recovered \$21 million, Texas \$31 million and California \$39 million.

The measure now goes to the Senate for consideration.

Local News

Health officials urge flu shots for those at risk

By ERICA KOLASKI
Cheboygan Tribune Staff Writer

CHEBOYGAN - Local health officials are asking people who fall into the "high-risk" category for susceptibility to the influenza virus to be vaccinated before Oct. 24. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention say that people with the following conditions should be vaccinated by the above listed date:

- € People with chronic health conditions.
- € Residents of long-term care facilities.
- € Children between the ages of 6 months and 23 months.
- € Pregnant women.
- € Health care personnel who provide direct patient care.
- € Household contacts and out of home caregivers of children less than 6 months of age.
- € People over the age of 65.

Reports say that the injectable flu vaccine is in short supply again this year and that anyone eligible should be vaccinated with FluMist, the nasal spray flu vaccine. FluMist is available for people 5 years of age to 49 years of age who are not pregnant.

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza virus. It can cause mild to severe illnesses and can lead to death. Health officials say that the best way to prevent getting the flu virus is by receiving a flu vaccination in October or November.

The flu is spread from person to person by respiratory droplets caused by coughing and sneezing. Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning one day before symptoms develop and up to five days after becoming sick.

Common-sense tips for avoiding the flu follow:

€ Avoid close contact with sick people or with others if you are sick.

€ Stay home when you are sick. Don't go to school, work or run errands.

€ Cover your mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing.

€ Wash your hands often, sick or not.

€ Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.

For more information, or if you are not sure if you are considered high-risk, call District Health Department No. 4 at 627-8850.

October 6, 2005

Local health officials bracing for flu season

Adequate supply of vaccine expected this year

By **CHRISTINE FINGER**
Record-Eagle staff writer

TRAVERSE CITY - Carol Narmore recalls the pandemonium preceding last year's flu season, but she doesn't expect a repeat. "We had a line all the way out to the street, and a lot of people still weren't able to get a flu shot," said Narmore, who volunteers to help distribute flu vaccine at the Traverse City Senior Center. "I get a shot every year because I have asthma and I just turned 65."

A lack of vaccine during the 2004 flu season meant people in high-risk groups - senior citizens, young children, health care providers, pregnant women and people with underlying chronic medical conditions - received the first shots.

Michael Collins, medical director at the Grand Traverse County Health Department, said the issue this year isn't supply, but timing.

"We will probably have plenty of vaccine, but it may be later in distribution to some of the providers than we're used to and really desire," he said.

The county health department so far has received 20 percent of the 2,000 vaccine doses it requested.

Collins said that although people traditionally choose to obtain flu shots in October and November and might have to wait a bit longer this year, it shouldn't pose a problem. He predicted much of the vaccine will be distributed in mid-November.

"We're trying to get the word out that it's actually fine to be vaccinated that late," he said, adding that health officials aren't anticipating a heavier-than-normal flu season.

The national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention asked healthy people to wait until Oct. 24 to get flu shots. Collins said that measure aims to first vaccinate members of at-risk populations, but doesn't necessarily mean providers will turn others away.

Collins recommended that people who want to get flu shots contact their health care provider or source of flu vaccine in previous years, or call their local public health department. He said the county health department will schedule upcoming vaccine clinics, and pharmacies and other private providers may currently have more doses they plan to distribute.

EARLY EDUCATION: Broken promises

Children lose Head Start opportunities; program's funding could drop if problems aren't fixed

October 6, 2005

BY CHASTITY PRATT
FREE PRESS EDUCATION WRITER

Some 800 poor children left without early education opportunities in the wake of school closings will remain without spots in Detroit's Head Start program because the city has been unable to find the classrooms needed to serve them.

For information about day care programs

Head Start serves students from low-income families, and when the program is unavailable, there are few free options for parents who can't afford other preschool or day care programs.

To find out about other available day care programs for low-income families, contact the state Department of Human Services at:

Detroit/Wayne County: Cadillac Place, 3026 W. Grand Blvd., Suite 11-350, Detroit; 313-456-0380

Oakland County: 41000 N. Woodward, Suite 358, Bloomfield Hills; 248-975-5051

Macomb County: 19700 Hall Road, Suite A, Clinton Township; 586-412-6100

Although it initially promised to find agencies to serve most of the children, the city's Department of Human Services -- which oversees Head Start -- acknowledges it has failed so far.

Now, the city is asking the federal government to trim the city's Head Start rolls by those 800 slots, which are worth more than \$3 million in funding.

So, for the foreseeable future, 800 children will not benefit from the

funding.

So, for the foreseeable future, 800 children will not benefit from the program, which provides early education and meals for preschoolers and works to meet the emotional, social and health needs of their families. And there are few to no other free preschool options for most of these families since the school district also cut its Michigan School Readiness Program spaces in June.

Budget cuts forced the Detroit Public Schools system to trim 629 Head Start spaces when 30 Detroit schools closed in June. Those came on top of 206 slots DPS cut last year.

While the city's Department of Human Services oversees Head Start and its 7,500 students, DPS is the biggest of eight Head Start providers, serving about 3,650 3- and 4-year-olds in the program.

Meanwhile, Detroit's Head Start program has been beset with other problems, too. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services notified the city in August that it was withholding more than \$900,000 because its plan for regaining the initial 206 slots dropped by the school system was incomplete.

Not only did the letter list problems with the budget application, the city's request was also turned in late.

That came on the heels of the federal Administration for Children and Families labeling the city's program as deficient in March for its financial management and because some providers had not enrolled enough children. That report could lead to the city's Head Start program losing federal money if the problems aren't fixed by next year. In the meantime, DHS is asking to serve 800 fewer students until it comes up with a plan to meet the needs with fewer schools. That could mean that the \$50 million in funding expected by Nov. 1 could be trimmed by more than \$3 million -- or about \$4,500 for each of the 800 slots.

No one is saying Detroit doesn't have preschool kids who need the classes. But in addition to being unable to find enough facilities following the school closings, many parents are only interested in full-day Head Start programs, which the city can't afford, officials said.

"Bottom line is, a child who doesn't get pre-kindergarten is just losing out," said Nancy Danley, who taught preschool for 34 years at Woodward Elementary before the school was shuttered in June.

A federally funded program for 3- and 4-year-olds whose families are at or below the poverty line, Head Start is perhaps nowhere more important than in Detroit, which the Census Bureau recently reported has a larger percentage of its population living under the poverty line than any other big city in America.

Shenetta Coleman, director of Detroit's DHS, said the department searched for several months for licensed facilities and organizations that could serve at least 500 of those students, but came up short.

"The City of Detroit has not been sitting on its hands," Coleman said.

"We're in the process of developing a plan."

Preparation for kindergarten

Because of privacy laws, the names of children and families who have been turned away or who are on waiting lists for Head Start since the school closures are not available, making it difficult to ascertain the precise impact the cuts are having.

But parents who have seen what Head Start has done for their kids, as well as teachers, are saying the program is vital to Detroit's poor children, many of whom are ill-prepared to start kindergarten.

For instance, Danley, the former Woodward Elementary teacher, said some preschool students would arrive for Head Start not knowing the alphabet song, colors or even their last names.

By the end of their first year, she said, they could recognize some words and had usually gained enough social skills to navigate a school setting.

"Some kids couldn't count past 10. By the end of the year, the whole class could count up to 100," said Leniya Leonard, whose daughter was in preschool at the Northwest Early Childhood Center last year.

Studies show poor students who participate in intensive preschool earn more and are arrested less as adults than those who do not.

The High/Scope Perry Preschool study, a more-than-40-year look at preschoolers in Ypsilanti, showed that at age 27, adults who had participated in intensive preschool programs had higher graduation rates, lower arrest rates and higher home ownership rates than those who did not take part.

Paula Kalt taught preschool for 16 years and last year was at Herman Academy, one of the schools that had to merge with another this year. She said the federal No Child Left Behind law demands that children learn to read younger, meaning Head Start is needed more than ever.

"Kindergarteners are writing sentences, illustrating them," she said.

"It's not nursery school; it's school and it's hard," she said. She called the fact that the city is losing seats sad for the children. "They're going to come into kindergarten so lost."

Contact CHASTITY PRATT at 313-223-4537 or pratt@freepress.com.

About Head Start

October 6, 2005

Head Start, a federally funded program, began in 1965 as a health and educational anti-poverty program to prepare children from low-income families for school.

RELATED CONTENT

EARLY EDUCATION: Broken promises

What went wrong

Head Start aims to serve the emotional, social, health, nutritional and psychological needs of 3- and 4-year-olds and their low-income families.

The U.S. Administration for Children and Families' regional offices grant funding directly to local public agencies, private organizations, Native American tribes and school systems.

Head Start agencies provide individualized services in early childhood development; medical, dental and mental health; nutrition, and parental involvement.

A family service assistant interviews each family to determine which health and social services -- including employment services -- it needs.

Head Start can be based in a school, a center or the child's home.

Classes are typically staffed with one teacher and two aides per 17 children.

Detroit's Head Start is run by the city's Department of Human Services.

Last year's budget was about \$50 million for about 7,500 students.

Source: Administration for Children and Families

10/4/2005 11:00:00 AM

Teens still missing

Sister of one runaway youth may have driven them

By Corky Emrick
Sturgis Journal

Sturgis Police and families are looking for two teens who ran away from their Sturgis homes last week.

Charles Robert Smith, 16, and Mandi Linn Allen, 15, are suspected to be together, along with Allen's older sister, 22-year-old Crystal Rose Dell.

Smith's parents last saw him on Sept. 25. Smith is 5 feet, 2-inches tall and weighs 110 pounds.

Allen was last seen Sept. 27. She is 5-2 and weighs 112 pounds, and has long, brown hair and hazel eyes.

Family members believe the two are being driven by Dell.

Dell has been in and out of trouble over the last two years. She is currently wanted by Branch County for a probation violation.

Dell is 5 feet, 2 inches tall and weighs 125 pounds. She has tattoos on both calves and another on her left wrist. She also has her right eyebrow piercing.

Family members believe the two are en route to Grand Rapids, where Allen has friends.

Her family also said another friend had moved to Arizona, so they may also be headed there.

The three were last seen in a 4-door, light blue car that has a lot of rust, police said. The make and model are not known.

Anyone with information may call the Sturgis Police at 659-7260 or (800) THE-LOST.

To the Editor:

"Locked Away Forever After Crimes as Teenagers" ("No Way Out" series, front page, Oct. 3) should be required reading at every high school in the country.

The primary message is that your actions have consequences and that regardless of your age, you will be held responsible for your actions. This message should be heard loud and clear by every teenager.

The fact that 9,700 juvenile offenders are serving life sentences, including 2,200 without the possibility of parole, is testimony to the fact that our justice system is working well.

I am sure there are many more juveniles who escaped the same fate because they were found not guilty or guilty of lesser offenses.

Ask the families of the victims how they feel about the fact that these guilty parties who killed their loved ones have been severely punished.

Yes, there is a human side to every offender, and they are all sorry now for what they did. This does not take away from the fact that they were judged guilty in a court of law and must pay for their actions.

MICHAEL F. MURPHY
Needham, Mass., Oct. 3, 2005

To the Editor:

As a volunteer poetry teacher at a maximum-security prison, I've interacted with several remarkable young men who were sentenced to life in prison for crimes committed at the age of 15 or 16.

When we condemn teenagers to an infinity of incarceration, as if "lock 'em up and throw away the key" were an acceptable 21st-century mantra, do we ever stop to consider what else we are throwing away?

The young inmates in my class have given me a haunting answer: sometimes poets, sometimes leaders, often lost adolescent souls who deserved a chance. SARAH STILLMAN
New Haven, Oct. 3, 2005

To the Editor:

You quote Timothy Kane, a convicted felony murderer, as saying, "I regret that every day of my life, being any part of that and seeing that," referring to the horrific murders of Madeline Weisser and John Bowers.

I venture to say that Mr. Kane's daily regret is due to the time he has to ponder his acts, that is, lifetime incarceration — as it should be.

BOB RAPHAEL
New York, Oct. 3, 2005

In Prison, for the Rest of One's Life

To the Editor:

If I read your article correctly, Timothy Kane was given a life sentence for watching a murder happen when he was 14, for not running away with the other kids, for not participating in the murder and for being curious. This sounds like fairly normal 14-year-old behavior. There is no logical explanation for this boy's sentence.

We need legislation to keep our children from being tried in adult courts and sentenced by judges who are bound by adult minimum-sentencing laws.

Children are never adults. They belong in juvenile court, where rehabilitation, not revenge and punishment, is the goal.

Children are being sent to adult courts using laws that were designed to curtail murders by gangs that used under-age kids. Aggressive prosecutors have been using these laws to try children as young as 10 years old as adults to show that they are "tough on crime," often to advance their careers.

Let's change the laws and stop throwing our children's lives away.

PAM KULIG
St. Charles, Ill., Oct. 3, 2005

To the Editor:

There's really no difference between a life sentence and a sentence of life without parole. The reality is that the 3,500 kids who have been given life sentences with the possibility of parole will never be released.

As filmmakers conducting interviews within California prisons, we heard wardens and guards explain that it takes about 10 years for a juvenile inmate to settle down and do "clean time" because these inmates see no reason to change behavior when faced with decades of time.

Often when maturity sets in, their record has been filled with infractions, ruining their chances for parole. A realistic opportunity for release would provide rehabilitation and incentives for juvenile inmates to change their behavior. This would save millions of taxpayer dollars and create a safer society.

LESLIE NEALE
TRACI ODOM
Pacific Palisades, Calif., Oct. 3, 2005
The writers are producers of
"Juvies," a documentary.

Open house Friday for new soup kitchen home

Thursday, October 06, 2005

MIKE THOMPSON
THE SAGINAW NEWS

For a few days late last winter, the Neighborhood House community center's gymnasium seemed more like a fancy seafood restaurant. The menu was catfish dinners with garden salads, potatoes and bakery bread.

"Hidden Harvest brought us more than 300 pounds of catfish," recalled Yvonne Riggins Thomas, the center's director. "A truck had broken down on the road, and they went right out there.

"What a feast. We had a ball over here. One day a week for five or six weeks, we had catfish for dinner."

Hidden Harvest will have even more resources to rescue surplus food at the \$2.95 million Hunger Solution Center, which has a grand opening from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. Friday at 940 E. Genesee.

The East Side Soup Kitchen will lease free space from Hidden Harvest in a joint venture that started two years ago and sparked fast fundraising despite a slow economy, finishing ahead of schedule and \$115,000 under budget.

"It's so great to see such a beautiful structure right there on East Genesee," Thomas said.

Her neighborhood outpost, along with others, will continue grassroots feeding programs for those who live nearby.

Meanwhile, the Hunger Solution Center will provide a regional centerpiece when it opens for meals on Monday.

The project is the result of a conversation between Pamela M. Cole, soup kitchen director since 1993, and Rich Premo, president of the 11-year-old Hidden Harvest effort.

Cole and Premo were discussing their mutual challenges with cramped space -- the soup kitchen at Warren Avenue Presbyterian Church, 612 Millard, and Hidden Harvest in a former downtown gasoline station at 319 Hayden owned by Galen E. Wilson Petroleum Co.

Both were grateful for the donated facilities, but both saw potential to do more.

"I want to thank the board of Hidden Harvest for not wanting just a building for themselves, but for having the consideration to include us," Cole said.

A list of 343 donors includes foundations, businesses, families and individuals, including the Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow Foundation of Midland, which contributed \$1 million.

Starting Monday, typical soup kitchen groups of 200 to 300 who took steps into Warren Avenue Presbyterian's basement gymnasium will eat in a glass-enclosed restaurant atmosphere with a full view of East Genesee.

"This is just like home," Mary Turner, the head cook since 1992, said during a Wednesday reception for project donors. "The food will be the same, but it will taste better here."

Associate Director Jessie Wilson, who started in 1989, said she is happy that senior citizens and those with physical challenges no longer will face a stairway.

"We finally have a stable location, a nice size for all of the people," Wilson said.

The opening menu for the soup kitchen's two shifts at 11 a.m. and 11:50 a.m. Monday is fried chicken, mashed potatoes and collard greens.

In the rear of the facility, a garage will house two Hidden Harvest refrigerated trucks and a pickup that the agency quietly had parked at downtown Saginaw Police Department headquarters.

Thomas said a Neighborhood House link with the soup kitchen comes through an annual Christmas dinner at First Congregational Church, with transportation provided across the community to clients of smaller agencies.

A Hidden Harvest truck, meanwhile, visits the Neighborhood House every Monday or Tuesday.

Top Neighborhood House sponsors are Lutheran Social Services of Michigan and the United Way of Saginaw County, but Thomas said Hidden Harvest provides 20 percent of food needs.

"It's like Christmas when they come," she said. "We never know what they're going to have, but cooked or uncooked, it helps with our budget.

"If a farmer has corn to donate, they call and our children have an adventure. They go and help pick the crop. It's a total collaboration."

Mike Thompson covers poverty issues for The Saginaw News. You may reach him at 776-9691.

Michigan Report

October 5, 2005

MILITARY PARENTAL RIGHTS: Military personnel serving overseas could not lose custody rights of their children under a bill that won unanimous approval Thursday by the House.

Support for HB 5100 was generated when a Grand Ledge National Guard member testified he lost custody after spending a year in Iraq despite sharing custody of his son on an equal basis for five years.

The bill, passed 108-0, prohibits a court from considering a parent's separation from his or her child due to military service when making a "best interest of the child" determination and declares that an established custodial environment with a parent could not be destroyed during that military service. It also prohibits decisions being made on permanent custody of children while a parent is deployed overseas.

House OKs bill on custody protections

L5J 10/6

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Military parents serving overseas could not lose custody of their children because of their deployment under legislation unanimously approved Wednesday by the state House.

The House voted 108-0 to send the bill to the Senate.

The bill would prevent a court

from making a decision about a child's custody based on a parent's separation while serving overseas with the military. It also would prohibit permanent custody from being decided while a parent was deployed overseas.

Last month, House members heard from a National Guardsman from Grand Ledge who said he lost custody of his son after

spending more than a year in Iraq. The boy's mother and her lawyer said the mother wanted full custody because she no longer found the soldier to be a fit father, and a court referee recommended against restoring shared custody to the father.

Reps. John Garfield, R-Rochester, and Clarence Phillips, D-Pontiac, were absent and did not vote.

News

Child support amnesty off to doubtful start

Friday, September 30, 2005 11:57 PM EDT

Program allows delinquent parents to pay up on debts without facing penalties.

By Dennis Pelham

Daily Telegram Staff Writer

ADRIAN - A 90-day amnesty program intended to help convince parents to catch up on delinquent child support payments began today amid doubts about the response it will bring.

The program allows parents who are behind in support payments to pay off the debt by the end of year without facing any state criminal or civil penalties, according to the Michigan Department of Human Services.

But delinquent parents still have to come up with all the cash they owe within 90 days, starting with an initial payment of at least 50 percent of the total support debt.

Allowing payments to be caught up without having a parent brought into court or facing penalties could be the incentive needed to clear up some cases, said Marilyn Stephen, director of the DHS Office of Child Support.

"We know that payment of child support is a good indicator that a parent will remain active in the lives of their children," Stephen said. "We want to do everything to encourage that involvement, and this is an opportunity for parents to get current in their child support payments without the fear of penalties."

To get into the amnesty program, a parent must submit a request form accompanied by at least half of the past-due support. All remaining past-due support must be paid by Dec. 31, when the amnesty period ends.

No one had inquired about the program at the Lenawee County Friend of the Court office before it officially went into effect Oct. 1, said Dennis Lehman, head of the county office.

"We're going to be ready for it. If people apply for it we will have the forms here," said Marshonnie Brinkman, assistant Lenawee County Friend of the Court.

There are about 6,000 active cases with child support orders in Lenawee County, she said, and at any time a majority of them have over-due amounts ranging from pennies to thousands of dollars.

An average of about 20 people a week are served with orders to appear in court to answer for delinquent payments, she said. Most of them make payment arrangements before their court date.

Brinkman said the success of other collection programs in recent years has left fewer people who could take advantage of the new amnesty program.

Those programs, she said, include drivers license suspensions, seizures of state and federal income tax refunds and a program that allows state officials to seize funds from bank accounts and financial institutions nationwide.

The amnesty program will probably not do much to clear up delinquent accounts in Lenawee County if the full amount still has to be paid within 90 days, commented Adrian attorney Priscilla Laidlaw, a part-time referee in the Friend of the Court office.

Tecumseh attorney Michael Brooks said the amnesty program does not seem to address the issues that most often put parents behind in paying support.

"I think the truth is most people try," said Brooks. "Most people I know do their level best."

When parents do fall behind, it is usually \$2,000 to \$3,000 as a result of being laid off from work or losing overtime hours, he said, causing them to struggle with all their bills.

When their economic conditions change significantly, he said, people too often wait months, hoping for a sudden turnaround in their fortunes, before petitioning the Friend of the Court for a support reduction. The problem, he said, is that if any reduction is granted it can only be retroactive to the date the petition was filed, not to the date the person's income declined.

Published October 6, 2005

75 - and still a crusader

Workers' rights leader enthralls E.L. students

By Nicole Geary
Lansing State Journal

EAST LANSING - Workers' rights icon Dolores Huerta boiled a lifetime of wisdom down to a few lasting lessons for local students Wednesday.

The 75-year-old coaxed middle-school girls to ask questions before a crowd of 250 peers, reminding them they can't let fear get in the way of being heard.

"Have you ever had an idea and no one paid attention to it?" she said.

"When that happens, announce it with drums. Put lights on it."

Huerta, who co-founded the United Farm Workers Union with Cesar Chavez, still fights against injustice to migrant farmworkers and all forms of racism and sexism.

She came to East Lansing for a concert in her honor Wednesday night, but not before interacting with tomorrow's leaders at MacDonald Middle School and Michigan State University.

"She's a strong Chicana role model who left us with a great legacy," said MSU student Claudia Gonzalez, who heard Huerta speak on campus before joining her for the assembly with seventh- and eighth-grade girls.

Middle school is a crucial time for young women to find self-worth, Huerta said.

Using examples from her life, she showed students what a strong woman can do for herself and others.

Huerta was a single mother of 11 children while she was organizing poor farm-workers to strike and lobbying for laws to improve their working conditions.

Young girls might not protest by fasting or leading marches, she said.

But you can write letters, donate money to things you're passionate about, she told the group.

"Don't wait to be invited," she said. "Step in there."

Principal Jack Bamford said hearing from one of history's most notable social activists likely didn't sink in Wednesday.

"Whether they appreciate it now, I think they'll realize it later on," he said.

Still, Ana Sofia Suarez, 11, said she was inspired by Huerta's words about women.

"She's reminded us we're equal. We can decide our own choices," she said.

Indeed, Huerta left the girls chanting three Spanish words to remember whenever someone tells them they can't pursue a sport, a career - anything.

"Si, se puede" - Yes, I can.

A musical tribute

- Diego Rivera, an MSU jazz instructor and musician, debuted a suite of music he wrote to honor Dolores Huerta during a benefit concert

Wednesday night at the Hannah Community Center.

- The event was a fundraiser for the Mexican American Culture Endowment, formed by Rivera and his family to foster Mexican-American studies through visiting scholars, artists and performers. The endowment was made in memory of Rivera's father, Pedro, a Lansing physician and former farmworker who supported the United Farm Workers Union.
- "His hope was always to go to California and work with the UFW," said Pedro Rivera's wife, Diana. "This concert for us is almost like a bridge to Dolores and her work."

Contact Nicole Geary at 377-1066 or ngeary@lsj.com.

Program helps migrants break language barrier

Thursday, October 06, 2005

By Gary W. Morrison
The Grand Rapids Press

SPARTA -- Going into a store to buy food is sometimes difficult for many migrant workers who come to the area for the apple-picking season.

But not for Antonio Montiel, 26, of Hidalgo, Mexico.

Montiel, who is working at an area orchard for the next month, has taken advantage of the English-As-A-Second-Language program offered by the Sparta school district.

"This is my second year here and my second year in the program, and I am learning a lot," he said. "I get to use my English in some of the stores I go to."

Teachers are conducting classes at 35 migrant camps, said Terri Anderson, a recruiter in the ESL program. Besides camps in the Sparta area, teachers are sent to Kent City, Holland, Belding, Lowell and Kenowa Hills.

"Even though we service a lot of camps, we are educating about half the people we did several years ago," Anderson said.

"When it comes to this program, budget cuts by the state are killing us."

Mike O'Connor, the adult education director, said funding has dropped from \$400 million to \$20 million over the past four to six years, and many districts have cut their adult education programs. Before the funding cuts, Sparta's adult migrant program was twice its size, he said.

Stacie VanOosterhout, an Aquinas College student, is visiting camps as part of her work to get a master's degree in education. She said she is impressed with the students' dedication, especially after a day of working in the fields.

"I noticed that they are different than the kids in public school," she said. "They are motivated to learn so they can get along better in the United States."

Police Search For Parents Of Boy Found Wandering

Investigators Say Child's Home In Poor Condition

POSTED: 4:16 pm EDT October 5, 2005

DETROIT -- Police continue to search for the parents of a boy who was found wandering Tuesday morning in a neighborhood on Detroit's west side.

A person spotted the 4-year-old walking alone in the 18000 block of Schoolcraft Road at about 8 a.m., according to police.

He was taken into protective custody while authorities search for his parents, Local 4 reported. Police were notified of the boy's home address by a caller, but the parents were not found there, according to the station's reports. Investigators said the home was in poor condition.

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Father is acquitted of charge

Thursday, October 06, 2005

By Steven Hepker
shepker@citpat.com -- 768-4923

A jury Wednesday acquitted a Jackson corrections officer of the most serious charges stemming from what police alleged was the attempted murder of his 16-year-old daughter.

The case hinged on whether the jury believed Henry V. Lott possessed heroin that he supposedly was to administer after nearly suffocating his daughter in plastic wrap.

"The heroin charge was not credible -- just too many holes," juror Tim Wohlford said after nine hours of deliberating. "Without the heroin, attempted murder falls."

The jury found Lott guilty of second-degree child abuse because Lott admitted to police he encased his daughter in cellophane. He claimed it was to sweat out a fever, although the girl testified she was not sick.

He was acquitted of attempted murder, heroin possession and domestic violence.

"The jury saw too many unanswered questions, and we didn't have the answers," Chief Assistant Prosecutor Mark Blumer said.

Circuit Judge Charles Nelson could sentence Lott to up to four years in prison on Nov. 9. Lott was suspended from his prison job without pay on April 21. Labor Relations will decide whether he is reinstated or fired, a prison spokesman said.

Prosecutors almost lost all four counts. One juror said she had heard of a similar technique to sweat out a fever, and she held out for a not guilty verdict on the child abuse charge until being convinced otherwise.

"No parent in their right mind would wrap their child with plastic," Wohlford said.

Also at issue was a garbage bag of evidence, primarily plastic wrap and rubber gloves Lott used in the April 19 incident in the girl's Springport home.

Lott's ex-wife, whom defense attorney Jerry Engle said had been dating a city police officer, apparently found the bag in Lott's pickup truck the next day. The jury was troubled by a police relationship to Lott's ex-wife, and with the whereabouts of the garbage bag before police received it.

As for the heroin, police said they found two packets of heroin on the back-seat floor of a police car in which Lott was transported. An officer testified he did not check the car before placing Lott inside.

Jurors said that created doubt. The prosecution claimed Lott planned to kill his troubled daughter because she broke up his marriage and was costing him \$520 a month in child support: He would wrap her in plastic enough to put her out, then administer a fatal dose of heroin.

He wrapped her twice, and each time he freed her or she got loose. There was no injection, and police did not find a syringe. The daughter, who had once filed a false police report, was not hurt.

Suspect asks to change plea in rape of teen

Thursday, October 6, 2005

By Tim Younkman
BAY CITY TIMES WRITER

A 31-year-old man, charged with raping a 14-year-old girl, is attempting to withdraw his plea to a lesser charge, said Bay County Prosecutor Joseph K. Sheeran.

In light of the action, sentencing for Ryan P. Burgdorf of 2280 E. Beaver Road, was delayed on Monday, Sheeran said.

Burgdorf had pleaded no contest to the felony charge of criminal sexual conduct-third degree involving a person between the ages of 13 and 15. He was jailed on \$1 million bond pending his sentencing by Circuit Judge William J. Caprathe.

Burgdorf was accused of raping the 14-year-old girl at his home on June 26. She and her younger sister escaped from him by climbing out a bedroom window and took a car to get to a friend's house to call police.

Authorities caught Burgdorf in the Burton area where he used a drug-store fax machine to try to get a bank to return a deposit he'd made on a home. He also had another man's birth certificate and indicated he might have been trying to create a new identity to escape prosecution.

Burgdorf also was listed as a habitual criminal. By pleading no contest to the charges against him, he was not admitting guilt but was treated as guilty for the purposes of sentencing, Sheeran said.

However, Burgdorf has a new attorney and there is a demand for a hearing on the motion to withdraw his no-contest plea. No date has been set for the hearing.

"We are going to oppose this vigorously," Sheeran said. "We don't think there is any basis for a change of plea at this stage."

He said the plea agreement allowed Burgdorf to be sentenced on the lesser charge of CSC-third degree rather than a CSC-1st degree which carries a life sentence. He also had won agreement that there would be a cap of 8 years in prison on the minimum sentence with a maximum of 15 years.

"Apparently now he feels he doesn't want to go to prison and it is a kind-of 'buyer's remorse,'" Sheeran said.

The plea agreement also indicated Burgdorf, who has two prior felony convictions, won't be treated as a habitual criminal at sentencing which could have enhanced the penalty.

No new sentencing date has been set, Sheeran said.

Thursday, October 6, 2005

Man faces charges of child porn Police say Washtenaw resident's computer had 1,000 images, including girl lured from home.

By David Shepardson / The Detroit News

DETROIT -- A Washtenaw County man faces charges of possessing child pornography, including pictures of a 15-year-old who had been lured away from her Maryland home by a 43-year-old man.

Robert Celan Gilbert Jr. of Newport was released on a \$10,000 unsecured bond by U.S. Magistrate Judge Donald Scheer on Tuesday after he was charged with possessing more than 1,000 images of child pornography -- including an image of a naked 15-year-old girl involved in a sex act.

On Jan. 31, an Aberdeen, Wash., man picked up the teenager in Maryland, a girl he had met months earlier on the Internet. William John Diehl then drove the girl across the country to Washington -- and both told the FBI that they had engaged in sexual relations at motels along the way home.

Diehl pleaded guilty on Sept. 27 to transporting a minor. He will be sentenced Jan. 6 by U.S. District Judge Ronald Leighton in Tacoma, Wash. There is no agreement as to Diehl's prison sentence.

Five days before Diehl was arrested -- on Feb. 11 -- Diehl sent Gilbert two pictures of the young victim, said FBI Special Agent Robert G. Schmitz in a five-page affidavit filed Monday in U.S. District Court in Detroit. Diehl and Gilbert had met in an internet chat room.

Gilbert told the FBI he is a member of "Michigan Masters and Slaves" and communicates with people of "like interests" on chat groups, the affidavit said.

A court-appointed lawyer for Gilbert, Jill Leslie Price, declined to comment on the case. Federal agents were led to Gilbert after reviewing files on Diehl's computer that showed he had sent two photos to Gilbert's e-mail address.

The pictures were found on Gilbert's computer when FBI agents searched his home Aug. 30. Diehl said he had met the girl on the Internet in October or November 2004 and that he had learned from her online profile that she was 15.

"Diehl claimed he and (the victim) fell in love during the months they communicated together over the Internet," the affidavit said.

According to the affidavit, Diehl drove from Washington to Maryland, where he met the 15-year-old girl at a train station. As he drove, the pair exchanged text messages on their cell phones.

On the return trip to Washington state, the pair engaged in sexual conduct and Diehl took pictures and video. He claimed he didn't post any photographs of the child on the Internet. Police arrested Diehl at his home on Feb. 16. The 15-year-old girl was there with him and she was turned over to foster care and then returned to her home.

Diehl, unemployed for more than a decade, had untreated mental health issues.

You can reach David Shepardson at (313) 222-2028 or dshepardson@detnews.com.

Police trace ways meth harms kids

Thursday, October 6, 2005

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Methamphetamine use in the home can have sorry consequences for children in the classroom -- and their teachers are hungry for information about how to recognize the signs of drug activity and what to do if they suspect it.

"Do your duty; do what you are trained to do," a Michigan State Police officer told 75 student-teaching interns Wednesday at a workshop on meth and how children in local schools may be affected by exposure to the drug or its components.

Southwestern Michigan is the heart of the state's illicit-methamphetamine problem, and the drug is often manufactured in homes and back yards.

While it shouldn't fall to a teacher to determine the source of a child's body odor or a parent's fidgety paranoia, just knowing what clues may be associated with the illicit drug can help alert teachers to possibilities that should be reported, said Devin Hahn, an intelligence officer for the State Police counter-drug division.

The student-teaching interns packed Hahn's special two-hour training session Wednesday, sponsored by The Urban Program, a partnership between Kalamazoo Public Schools and Western Michigan University's College of Education. The event was held at KPS' West Main Professional Development Center.

Tracy DeMars, organizer of the event, said teachers and interns are clamoring for more information about the drug and how they should respond; she had to turn away 25 people from Wednesday's session because of space restrictions. "The breadth of need and interest on the part of educators is there," she said.

Hahn told the rapt audience the history of methamphetamine use and its spread into southwestern Michigan and described the common ways the drug is used and is made in homes here.

"This is the world a child lives in" when there's a meth lab in the home, Hahn said as he showed police photographs of homes strewn with chemicals and drug apparatus. "And then you want them to pay attention in school?"

The interns were quick to do the math, noting that the dates the drug began its emergence here in the late 1990s coincided with when many of their students were being born.

"This is just the time you elementary teachers will start seeing" the children of meth-using parents, Hahn said.

Symptoms in children who have been exposed to the drug, through secondhand smoke or component chemicals brewing in their homes, may include frequent respiratory problems, delayed speech, poor dental health and hygiene problems. Some may carry the odor of meth chemicals, a smell similar to that of cat urine. Children may also exhibit violent behavior and poor school performance and may be unusually attached to the teacher or unusually isolated, Hahn said, citing studies from other states where meth has been a problem longer.

Hahn said teachers who suspect that meth may be contributing to student problems should take care to limit their own exposure and should call in home-support specialists to discuss their concerns.

"Use your support channels to get help for the child," he urged.

Raise awareness to save children

The Grand Rapids Press

Thursday, October 06, 2005

Tragic stories of children dying in scorching vehicles has fueled interest in legislation to punish such neglect. Michigan lawmakers are considering a bill that would revise the various degrees of criminal child abuse. While well-meaning, the state Legislature would be wise to focus on education and awareness as it pertains to preventing such child deaths.

Legislation sponsored by State Rep. William Van Regenmorter, R-Hudsonville, would make it a crime to intentionally commit an act likely to cause physical harm to a child, regardless of whether physical harm results. For example, a person who left a child in a hot car for a period that could cause injury could be charged with a felony, punishable by up to a year in prison, even if the child suffered no injuries.

There is too much gray area

in this bill -- especially related to intent. How long is too long to leave a child? What is the temperature threshold? Parents and guardians deserve to be prosecuted when their actions cause or jeopardize the life of a child, but adequate laws exist now to prosecute those whose intent is clear.

Attention should be on a campaign to educate parents and caregivers about the hazards of leaving children alone in cars or elsewhere. Nonprofit groups such as Kids in Cars are calling for state legislators to raise awareness to prevent deaths, not to ensure prosecution after the fact.

Good judgment cannot be legislated.

How to fight back against high energy bills

BY MEGAN OWENS

The average family spends over \$1,500 a year on energy bills, nearly half of which goes to heating and cooling costs.

Through commonsense actions and improved technologies, consumers can save hundreds of dollars by using energy more efficiently. Not only will these actions save consumers money each year, but they will also help reduce pollution and reduce the nation's dependence on fossil fuels.

Here are five simple ways to cut home energy costs:

- Heat smart: Install a programmable thermostat and set it to automatically adjust the temperature to meet your comfort needs efficiently during different times of the day. A programmable thermostat can save you \$100 a year with decreased heating or air conditioning of an empty or sleeping house.
- Simple maintenance: Check air filters every season and get your heating and cooling systems professionally checked once a year. A dirty air filter can increase your energy costs and lead to early equipment failure.
- Don't heat the whole neighborhood: If you feel cold air along the edges of your windows and doors, you're wasting energy and money. The attic, basement, and unfinished rooms are generally the biggest culprits for air leaks. Caulk and weather-strip around drafty doors and windows. Consider new windows or clear plastic window insulators if you have old, drafty windows.
- Change five lights: Replace your five most frequently used light fixtures, or the light bulbs in them, with ones that have earned the Energy Star, to save more than \$60 each year in energy costs. Their up-front price is a bit higher, but they will use two-thirds less energy and can last up to ten times longer.
- Look for Energy Star labeled products: When shopping for new appliances, home electronics or other products, look for the Energy Star-labeled products that meet strict energy efficiency criteria set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Department of Energy. They use less energy, help prevent air pollution and can reduce energy costs by 30 percent, saving the typical homeowner \$500 each year.

For more energy saving tips visit www.energystar.gov.

About the author

Megan Owens is consumer advocate for PIRGIM, the Public Interest Research Group in Michigan.

About the forum

The forum is a periodic column of opinion written by Record-Eagle readers in their areas of interest or expertise. Submissions of 500 words or less may be made. Please include biographical information and a photo.

NEWS: Opinion

Ready for fall home heating?

Petoskey News Review

Wednesday, October 5, 2005 2:59 PM EDT

We've enjoyed months of long, warm days, but the calendar tells us it won't be long before the days get shorter and the temperatures cooler.

There's no sense in waiting until it's time to light a fire in the wood stove or turn up the thermostat on the furnace. The fall heating season is just around the corner so we'd better get ready.

Home heating businesses are only a phone call away and can provide the necessary cleaning and checking your heating units need to keep you and your family toasty warm all winter long.

Those who burn wood know that time spent this fall in cleaning the wood stove and chimney can prevent a tragedy from happening in the cold months ahead. Chimneys and stoves need to be cleaned well of built-up creosote from last year's burning season. The removal of creosote every fall helps reduce the possibility of a fire during the long heating season. Anyone who is not up to this task can call on a number of professionals in the area to do the job right.

Wood stoves, furnaces and fireplaces will soon be in high demand, and taking a few minutes now will help assure top operating proficiency and a safe heating season.

Fall is also the time of year to replace the batteries in your home's smoke detectors. If your home does not have any operational smoke alarms, then please, make a point of purchasing one for every floor in your home and having them installed today. Statistics prove that home smoke detectors save lives every year.

In addition to one smoke detector on each floor, the units should also be installed in all of the sleeping areas of the home.

Another tiny unit you can purchase to add another level of security for your loved ones is a carbon monoxide detector. Every year, we read stories of people who die in their beds from carbon monoxide poisoning as the result of malfunctioning fuel-burning appliances, fireplaces, flue systems and chimneys. With smoke and fire we have the chance to smell and feel danger, whereas carbon monoxide can quietly invade the home with its odorless, colorless, tasteless and non-irritating poison. You can protect your family from the "silent killer" by installing a simple and relatively inexpensive CO detector.

A properly installed CO detector can reduce the danger of CO poisoning and offer the same life-saving protection we have come to rely upon with smoke detectors.

Other fall safety tips worth mentioning include cleaning excess lint buildup in your clothes dryer vent pipe, cleaning/replacing air filters in your kitchen stove exhaust hood, and making sure your home's fire extinguishers are full and ready to use. Be sure to place fire extinguishers where everyone knows they are, ideally next to the kitchen stove, fireplace and wood stove ... not tucked away in the closet or basement.

This fall is also a good time to go over additional fire safety information with your family, such as what to do if your clothing catches fire and how to crawl through a smoke-filled room. In-home fire drills will make sure everyone knows what to do and where to go in case of a fire.

We urge everyone to take the time this fall to invest a little time and money into making sure their homes are safe this winter.

Published October 6, 2005
[From the Lansing State Journal]

Heat: Lawmakers should consider temporary cap on natural gas bills

Now that Michigan lawmakers have dealt with such weighty matters as post-Labor Day school starts and bans on Internet hunting, they are ready for an even bigger challenge:

How residents will heat their homes this winter.

Brace yourself, lawmakers - you need to consider the "R" word. That's right, more regulation of natural gas bills.

Now, before the folks at Consumers Energy and Michigan Consolidated shut us down, consider a few points:

- Natural gas prices are going through the roof. An estimate in early September put natural-gas heating cost increases at 30 percent in Michigan. (We're "lucky." Other Midwest states are looking at up to 70 percent increases this winter.)
- Michigan can't expect much help from Washington, D.C. The word from the feds is lower your thermostat and don't expect any increases in heating aid to low-income residents.
- Hurricanes Katrina and Rita have hampered natural-gas extraction and delivery. Analysts say as much as 15 percent of domestic gas capacity may be blocked off for six months. (Michigan, however, does lead the nation in gas storage, which helps to stabilize prices, says the state Public Service Commission.)
- Michigan has experience with natural-gas regulation; experience in circumstances far less dire than this. Michigan froze gas rates in 1998 as part of its move to deregulate the market. This was done to protect consumers against sudden shifts in prices.

Well, consumers are again facing sudden shifts; big bad ones.

The utilities will argue that capping customer prices would be a huge blow to their businesses.

And it is a blow.

But consider the alternative:

Michigan residents aren't going to freeze. They'll pay for heat. And every extra dollar they pay is a dollar not spent on other goods; not spent on things that sustain jobs and Michigan's overall economy.

A one-year natural gas bill adjustment might not be the best long-term utility policy. But it may be the best available choice for Michigan right now.

Group reports lack of affordable housing

Thursday, October 06, 2005

By Greg Chandler
The Grand Rapids Press

OTTAWA COUNTY -- An Ottawa County group says finding an affordable place to live is becoming more difficult.

That is why some say it is time the county established a Housing Commission.

"The market is not meeting the demand for affordable housing, especially for low-income individuals," said Matthew Van Zetten, one of the group's members and former coordinator of the Ottawa Area Housing Coalition.

Such a commission, supporters say, would provide a forum to address affordable housing needs on a countywide basis and could lead to additional federal funding for housing initiatives.

Representatives of the 16-member study group recommended the creation of the Housing Commission on Wednesday to the county board's Health and Human Services Committee.

"Ottawa County is one of the few counties (in Michigan) that doesn't have a Housing Commission at the local level or the county level," said county spokeswoman Erika Rosebrook Dibble, who also was part of the study group.

Commissioner Cornelius Vander Kam, who is chairman of the committee, says he has strong reservations about establishing such an organization.

"I question, for the number of people that would be served, if a housing authority is really worth it," said Vander Kam, a commissioner from Georgetown Township.

However, Van Zetten and Rosebrook Dibble say the numbers back their position. According to the 2000 census, 12,655 residents -- roughly 5 percent of the county's population -- were found to be living below the federal poverty line.

In addition, a January study by the Ottawa Area Housing Coalition found 373 people were homeless and 205 more were at risk of becoming homeless within 30 days. Also, 378 households in the county are on a waiting list for federally subsidized Section 8 housing, a list considered to be about two years long.

If the county were to establish a Housing Commission, it would be in line to gain additional Section 8 vouchers, which are now administered through the county's Community Action Agency. Without a commission, the county has lost opportunities to add vouchers, which end up being redistributed to other areas of the state, Van Zetten said.

"By creating the infrastructure itself and getting approval from (the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development), these vouchers would stay in Ottawa County," he said.

If created, the group believes the commission should focus its efforts on people on fixed incomes, people who have completed transitional housing programs and those who work in service professions.

A number of local agencies have worked together on a transitional housing program in recent years to help those who have been homeless. However, the report says some who have been through such programs still are finding it difficult to afford their own place.

"They double up with family members or recycle into a housing crisis within one year," Van Zetten said.

The Health and Human Services Committee agreed last year to form a study group to investigate the housing commission idea. The committee is expected to revisit the study group's recommendations next month, Vander Kam said.

Panel: Form housing commission

Thursday, October 06, 2005

By Greg Chandler
MUSKEGON CHRONICLE NEWS SERVICE

Representatives of a special panel said finding an affordable place to live in Ottawa County is becoming increasingly difficult, and recommended the county establish a housing commission. "The market is not meeting the demand for affordable housing, especially for low-income individuals," said Matthew Van Zetten, one of the group's members and former coordinator of the Ottawa Area Housing Coalition.

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The committee is expected to revisit the study group's recommendations next month, Vander Kam said.

Housing Commission gets high score

Story created Oct 06, 2005 - 11:21:41 EDT.

SAULT STE. MARIE - The Sault Ste. Marie Housing Commission was recently deemed a "high performer" by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) based on an elaborate method of measurement known as the Public Housing Assessment System (PHAS).

With nearly one third of the SSMHC budget funded by HUD, the local housing commission is evaluated by the same methodology as similar organizations throughout the United States. Measured on a four-part system concerning finances, physical inspections, management, and tenant satisfaction, the SSMHC rated a score of 96 out of a possible 100, according to a news release.

"We were excited to get our score," said SSMHC Executive Director Patricia Shimmens. "We've been a high performer since the system of assessing housing commissions began approximately 18 years ago, so we have our own high standards to meet."

Recognition as a high performer comes with some perks. As such, the commission receives a three percent bonus, which amounts to an additional \$11,817 for capital improvements. Next on the organization's capital improvement plan is a roof replacement at Riverview Terrace and interior remodeling at James Terrace. Planned for fiscal year 2005-06, the projects will total \$320,000.

Another benefit of high performer status lies in the fact that the physical inspections for high performers is required every two years, instead of the annual schedule imposed upon those with average or troubled scores.

The system also has a practical side benefiting the hundreds of individuals residing in public housing. With thorough inspections, tenant surveys, and management reviews, residents reap the rewards of having a landlord that is accountable to others.

"HUD looks at many different factors, including things like how long it takes to respond to a maintenance request or complete a work order. Emergencies are addressed right away, but even more impressive is the fact that average work orders submitted by our renters are handled in approximately one-and-a-half days," she explained, crediting the staff for their great response.

As part of the PHAS assessment, the various properties also undergo thorough physical examination by a HUD-contracted inspector.

Everything from sidewalks, to boilers, to roofs are examined on a random number of buildings.

Tenant surveys are another tool used to assess the organization. HUD randomly selects tenants and quizzes them by mail on a wide range of topics. The completed survey is mailed directly back to HUD without any involvement from local staff.

Scores from the tenant surveys are compared by HUD to others around the nation. In every sub-category (neighborhood appearance, safety, maintenance and repair, services, and communication) the SSMHC outscored the national average on every question, scoring particularly high in the areas of services, and maintenance and repair.

Shimmens said the feedback from tenants is one of the most important aspects of the PHAS because, "It tells us how good a job we are doing and indicates what our strengths are and where we might benefit from improvement."

In addition to surveys, management reviews and inspection, HUD also considers the overall financial picture of the organization and its fiscal management. In this particular category, SSMHC scored 29 out of 30 possible points. Measurement is based upon fund balance, accounts receivable, and other financial indicators.

Shimmens credits the staff for the high performer designation. "The staff is the backbone here. They perform their jobs in accordance with regulations and with real commitment and because of them, we continue to garner great scores."

Clemency requests fail to provoke response

FLUSHING TOWNSHIP

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Thursday, October 06, 2005

By Bryn Mickle bmickle@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6383

FLUSHING - Samuel Chapman thought his daughter's request for clemency for a murder conviction would have a more sympathetic ear when John Engler left office.

But nearly three years after Gov. Jennifer Granholm's election, Melissa Chapman and 19 other imprisoned women are still waiting.

"We're hoping things will come around," said Samuel Chapman of Flushing, whose daughter is serving life in prison for murder.

Melissa Chapman is one of three Genesee County women whose pleas for freedom are being championed by the Michigan Battered Women's Clemency Project.

The Ann Arbor-based advocacy group will hold a rally at noon Friday on the steps of the state Capitol in Lansing.

The group maintains that women such as Chapman were wrongfully convicted because they were abused by men.

Chapman claimed her boyfriend raped, beat and burned her with cigarettes. When he killed a man during a drug deal in 1987, she helped hide the body because she said she feared for her life.

Mary Suchy of Flint was convicted of hiring a contract killer to slay her husband in 1982.

Investigators portrayed her as cold-blooded but advocates for her release say she feared her husband would kill her.

Linda Sanders of Flint shot her boyfriend in 1991 during a struggle over a gun but allegedly was not allowed to introduce evidence of abuse at her trial.

Clemency Project coordinator Carol Jacobsen said the group had high hopes when Granholm was elected.

"She professes to be compassionate and caring," said Jacobsen, a professor at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor.

While Engler rejected the group's clemency petitions at "the speed of light," Jacobsen said Granholm has had them on her desk for two years.

In that time, one woman on the list died and another was paroled. Two more women have since been added.

Jacobsen said clemency requests are an uphill battle. Not a single request made by the Clemency Project has been granted since the group formed 14 years ago.

"It's not politically helpful to appear soft on crime. (Politicians) are cowardly to do the right thing," Jacobsen said.

The governor's office could not be reached for comment Wednesday afternoon.

Samuel Chapman said his daughter continues to take classes and better herself for a 2008 release date he hopes comes sooner rather than later.

"It's been pretty hard, but we're hoping things will come around," said Samuel Chapman.

Victim or killer? Clemency faces fight

Thursday, October 06, 2005

Grand Rapids Press News Service

It has been more than 12 years since Kimberly Lundgren and her then-boyfriend confessed to shooting her husband to death while he slept in the Lundgrens' Fillmore Township home. Now an effort to gain clemency for Lundgren is drawing fire from Allegan County prosecutors who want her kept in prison.

Lundgren is one of 20 Michigan women imprisoned for their involvement in killing their husbands and whose cases are being championed by the Michigan Battered Women's Clemency Project. The Ann Arbor-based organization says these women were abused and their husbands were killed in self-defense.

The group is holding a rally at noon Friday at the state Capitol in its efforts to have Gov. Jennifer Granholm grant the women clemency.

Lundgren "was a severely battered woman and she was peripherally, if at all, involved in ... (her husband's) death," said Carol Jacobsen, the clemency project's coordinator. Jacobsen stated Lundgren did not expect her boyfriend to kill her husband.

But Margaret Bakker, Allegan County's chief assistant prosecutor, disagrees.

"She planned over a long period of time to kill her husband and her children," Bakker said. "She admitted that and ... (the boyfriend) admitted that."

Lundgren, now 45, pleaded no-contest to second-degree murder and is in the Robert Scott Correctional Facility in Plymouth, where she is serving a life sentence.

Her husband, James Lundgren, 42, was shot to death on July 30, 1993, shortly after Kimberly Lundgren's boyfriend, Dennis Leonard Jr., entered the Lundgrens' home with his .22-caliber revolver.

Kimberly Lundgren, then 33, and Leonard, then 19, both confessed to their involvement on the day of the murder, but authorities never determined who fired the shots.

County prosecutors believe the two planned to kill James Lundgren and the Lundgrens' two children, Morgan, then 3, and Mason, then 23 months, so Leonard and Kimberly Lundgren could pursue their affair and cash in on a \$100,000 life-insurance policy. The plan to kill the children was abandoned at the last minute, prosecutors said.

Leonard pleaded guilty to second-degree murder and was sentenced to 25 to 50 years in prison.

In a 1994 interview, Lundgren said she and her husband moved to Allegan County in the late 1980s in part to get a fresh start after several instances in which she was battered.

But she said the abuse continued. In one instance, Kimberly Lundgren called her father, who said he confronted his son-in-law.

James Landenberger, who has since died, said his daughter's nose was broken and quite a bit of her hair was pulled out, according to old news accounts. Still, Kimberly Lundgren said she declined to press charges and returned to her husband.

Bakker said in 1994 that Lundgren told police that her husband did not abuse her in the month before his death. Judge Harold Beach, who sentenced Lundgren, said at the time that he believed the abuse ended years before the murder and wasn't the motive for the shooting.

The clemency project literature makes various claims alleging abuse of Lundgren by her husband, based on information supplied by Lundgren, according to Jacobsen.

Jacobsen said she had no independent documentation to support those claims.

The clemency project literature also refers to Lundgren's "trial," although no trial was ever held because Lundgren pleaded no-contest to the charges.

Woman faces attempted murder charge

Thursday, October 06, 2005

MUSKEGON CHRONICLE NEWS SERVICE

A woman accused of pouring hot cooking oil on her husband waived her probable-cause hearing Monday.

My-Hanh Thi Nguyen, 49, is charged with attempted murder in the Sept. 16 assault of her husband, Nhan Van Mail, in their house at 1445 Silver Springs Court SE in Gaines Township. He suffered burns to much of his body, and remained hospitalized Monday in the burn unit at Spectrum Health Blodgett.

Police said he was in stable condition.

Nguyen waived her hearing before Grand Rapids Township District Judge Sara Smolenski, who ordered the case bound over to Kent County Circuit Court. Assistant Prosecutor Kellee Koncki said she is negotiating a possible plea deal, but "there is not a specific offer on the table at this time."

Sheriff's detectives said the wife was upset over finances and her husband's relationships with other women when she heated up cooking oil and poured it on her husband, who was on the couch. They had argued while she cooked breakfast that morning, police said.

Family members told police the two had argued several days prior to the assault.

Jury convicts former student in torture case

Thursday, October 06, 2005

DARRYL Q. TUCKER
THE SAGINAW NEWS

A former Saginaw Valley State University student is headed to prison for torturing his former girlfriend by beating her and burning her lips because she refused to marry him.

Mohammed H. Al-Khalil, 24, learned Wednesday that he will spend the next 18 to 50 years behind bars for kidnapping the 25-year-old Japanese woman, assault with intent to commit great bodily harm, felonious assault and mayhem March 25, 2004, at his Saginaw Township apartment.

A jury convicted Al-Khalil, who is a native of Saudi Arabia. He lists a Midland address in court records.

"In reaching those convictions, the court and the jury heard horrendous testimony on your vicious attack of your girlfriend, who weighed less than 100 pounds," said Saginaw County Circuit Judge Fred L. Borchard.

"You brutalized and tortured this young woman with the intent of disfiguring and maiming her. You beat and humiliated her."

Borchard told Al-Khalil that he hailed from a privileged family and spent many years in the United States attending college, but chose to throw those opportunities away.

"You took advantage of our social structure, lifestyle and education, and then abused those privileges and took advantage of your victim," the judge said. "Not only have you physically scarred her for life, you also emotionally scarred her beyond what any of us might comprehend." The two met several years ago as SVSU students.

The victim was en route to Washington, D.C., when Al-Khalil picked her up from a Detroit train depot, police said. They went to Al-Khalil's then residence at Waterside Apartments, on Green Isle Way near McCarty in Saginaw Township, and had dinner, washed her clothes and drank vodka.

Al-Khalil brought up marriage but she refused to discuss it, detectives said. He became angry. Al-Khalil forced the woman to drink more vodka and she got sick, prosecutors said. He then ordered her to take a shower.

Next he asked her where would she like to get beaten, investigators said. She responded on the bottom of her feet, authorities said. Al-Khalil beat her and told her not to scream.

After beating her with a sandal, Al-Khalil used an aluminum pipe to beat her feet, which caused her to scream, police said.

The woman ran from the apartment to get help and saw a woman near a carport, police said. Al-Khalil told the bystander the victim was drunk and didn't need help.

Al-Khalil forced her into the car and drove to a gasoline station, then to an isolated area, detectives said.

Al-Khalil pressed the victim's eyeball so hard with his thumb that she could not see; struck her head several times; used a lighter to burn her lips, hair and wrists; and choked her until she lost consciousness, police said.

The woman decided to play dead so Al-Khalil would stop torturing her, investigators said.

Al-Khalil returned her to his apartment and left, prosecutors said.

Al-Khalil has maintained that he was wrongly convicted and did not intend to injure the woman.

He has said he and the victim were drunk the night of the incident.

Doctors at the Covenant Emergency Care Center and later at the University of Michigan Medical Center in Ann Arbor treated the woman for third- and fourth-degree burns to her face and thumbs, and bruises over nearly all of her body, prosecutors said.

Darryl Q. Tucker covers courts for The Saginaw News. You may reach him at 776-9686.

IN BRIEF

Jackson Citizen Patriot

Thursday, October 06, 2005

Steven Hawley of Leoni Township was arraigned in District Court on Wednesday after threatening his ex-wife and her husband with a 9-inch knife at their Leoni Township home. Hawley, 38, was charged with carrying a concealed weapon and was issued a \$1,000 cash surety bond by Magistrate Frederick C. Bishop.

Hawley parked his car in front of his ex-wife's home in the 200 block of Holmes Street on Saturday night and then told his wife to send out her husband as he flashed the knife, police said. A preliminary hearing is scheduled for Oct. 19 before District Court Judge Charles J. Falahee Jr.

Compiled from staff reports

Open house will showcase Kids Closet program

Friday, September 30, 2005 11:57 PM EDT

The Adrian Training School recently converted an 800-square-foot building to house the growing program.

By Chris Gautz

Daily Telegram Staff Writer

ADRIAN - A blossoming children's clothing donation program and the Adrian Training School have come together for the benefit of both, and their work will be showcased at an open house Sunday.

The Kids Closet program was started by 14-year-old Jarrett Patterson with the goal of helping a few of his Hudson classmates receive used clothing. It is now available for all Lenawee County schools.

The Adrian Training School recently converted an 800-square-foot building on its campus to house the expanding program, which it is using as a way to help the girls at the facility while allowing them to again interact with the community.

The open house will take place from 1 to 3 p.m. Sunday. ATS' Citizens Advisory Action Council organized the event so the community can see the progress that has been made since it converted to an all girls-facility.

The Kids Closet allows school personnel who may notice a student who could use a new outfit to contact Patterson, who then goes through the donated clothing items he has collected that fit the student's needs. The school official picks up the package of clothes and delivers it to the student.

Now with a new facility at the training school, the girls there will learn how to inventory clothes and understand the ordering, packaging and distribution process.

"This is a way for our girls to participate by giving back to the community," ATS deputy director Melvin Whitlow said.

Whitlow said no other training school in state has a program like this - a claim the school won't hold on to for long.

"There's no question something like this will catch on," Whitlow said. "It's a win-win for the training school and the community because of the interaction with both."

Whitlow said he hopes people will come out to tour the campus Sunday and even bring a clothing donation for the Closet with them if they wish.

Jae Guetschow, president of the CAAC, said it is important for the girls at the training school to have an opportunity to interact with residents again.

"That's been the success of the training school for all its years, to be connected to the community," he said.

Guetschow said the Kids Closet will be a great addition to the campus and will help both the girls at the training school and the students receiving the clothes.

"I think it's just the perfect match for us," Guetschow said. "When I first heard about it I thought it was a spectacular idea."

The Closet is open on Wednesdays and Saturdays for donations and for school officials to pick up their orders. The hours are from 5 to 8 p.m. on Wednesdays and from 9 a.m. to noon on Saturdays.

To send a request, school officials can send an e-mail to Patterson and list the sex, age, clothing size and type of item needed, and he will have it ready by the next pick-up day.

To make a request, e-mail Jarrett Patterson at kidscloset03@hotmail.com.